

Gaspar Papy House
36 Avilés Street
St. Augustine
St. Johns County
Florida

HABS No. FLA-164
HABS
FLA.

55-SAUG

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PHOTOGRAPH
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Eastern Office, Design and Construction
143 South Third Street
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HABS No. FLA-164

GASPAR PAPY HOUSE

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Address: 36 Avilés Street, St. Augustine, St. Johns County, Florida.

Present Owner: Sisters of St. Joseph.

Present Use: The Gaspar Papy House is now part of a convent-school complex that occupies the block bounded by Avilés, Bridge, St. George, and Cadiz Streets. The historic Don Miguel de O'Reilly House at 32 Avilés Street (see HABS No. FLA-123) also is part of this complex. The Papy House, with its extensive twentieth-century interior alterations, is occasionally used as a residence for visiting priests.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

In 1962 the St. Augustine Historical Society was requested to supply historical information for the "Don Toledo" House at 36 Avilés Street, and other historic structures in the city, for a series of radio programs. The following report is the result of their research:

The name "Don Toledo" which has been connected with this house for several years is arroneous, and was used in connection with an exhibit of antique furniture which was displayed there in the 1920's. A pamphlet was published and distributed at that time which stated that this building was "The Oldest House in America, . . . built in 1516 by Don Toledo, for his Indian bride, assisted by the Seminole Indians . . ." This would have been only three years after Ponce de León discovered Florida, and 49 years before Don Pedro Menéndez de Avilés founded St. Augustine. There were no Seminole Indians in Florida until the 18th century. Unfortunately, this legend is still being repeated to visitors by various guides, whereas the story of Gaspar Papy, the documented builder of the house, is of far more interest.

Gaspar Papy was of Greek parentage, born in Smyrna, Turkey, and came to Florida with the Turnbull colony in 1768. After the refugees from the New Smyrna colony removed to St. Augustine, Gaspar married Ana Pons. A few years later, in 1792, after three of their children had been born, Gaspar suffered an accident, and believing that it might cost his life, he made a will. The will recited that at this time he had a house where he and his family lived, and a store, where he sold a line of general merchandise, one alave, some horses and other animals, which he declared he had acquired since his marriage.

He recovered from the accident, and subsequently amassed a considerable estate, including a house on St. George Street near Bridge, where he lived, three houses on Charlotte Street, two on Hospital or Avilés Street, of which one is the building being considered here. His second will, dated July 7, 1817, names seven children, and describes the properties he owned at that time, including a plantation on the Ferry Road, five slaves, a stock of goods and provisions in his shop, plus horses and cattle. He states that he built the two houses on Avilés Street after he purchased the lot with the one old wooden house on it, from Julian Pany. Since he purchased the property from Pany in 1801, and died in 1817, the house here considered was one of the two built sometime during the intervening years, the exact date not determined.

Beginning with the earliest record we have at this time, the 1764 Puente map,¹ we have compiled the following history from documentary sources:

1764 Puente No. 264: 2 masonry houses of Doña Teresa del Pueyo.

Puente sold these houses to James Henderson, confirmed by the Moncrief (British) map of 1765;² in 1772 Henderson was bankrupt, and his properties sold to various purchasers. Records indicate that title to this area was granted to John Houghton by the British Crown and later sold at auction to one Charles Delap. Delap sold to George Backhouse, excepting a lot 35 ft. 8 inches East and West, 143 ft. 10 inches deep, which he sold to Darby Larey. These British transfers are recited in a Spanish certificate of title to Juan Solom, of Minorca, who purchased the lot from Larey in 1789.

Solom sold in 1794, to Julian Pany, "a Grenadier of the third batallion of the Cuban Regiment which garrisons in this city, a house built of wood, with its corresponding lot. . ." On October 5, 1801, Pany sold the lot with its wooden house to Gaspar Papy.

The two coquina houses that Papy later constructed are described in the inventory of his estate as having a common or connecting wall, a fact which is confirmed by photographs of the present structure, or north house, which show the roofline of a previous structure on the south side, and the

¹Juan Joseph Elixio de la Puente, Map "San Agustín de la Florida," with key. 1764.

²James Moncrief, "Plan of the Town of St. Augustine." (Encl. with letter of Governor Grant to Lords of Trade. March 1, 1765.) Public Records Office--C05/540 pp. 178-209.

fact that there still remains on the south wall the chimney and fireplace which originally served the south half, which was demolished at some undetermined date. Each of the houses had its own kitchen and its own chimney.

José Papy, Gaspar's youngest son, received the south portion of house in 1824 when his father's estate was finally divided, and in 1830, his mother deeded the north portion, or present remaining house to him. After the civil war the property was sold for taxes, but finally came into the possession of William J. Sánchez, in 1887.

Sánchez leased the house to Everett C. Whitney in 1903, and Mr. Whitney operated a museum in it for several years, during which time it was known as "Whitney's Oldest House." It was owned in the 1920's by Mr. and Mrs. Frederick Hewitt from whom the property was purchased in 1928 by the Sisters of St. Joseph, the present owners.

Prepared by Mrs. Doris Wiles
and

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St. Augustine Historical Society
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PART II. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Although the Papy House is not dealt with specifically in Albert Manucy's book on St. Augustine's historic architecture, it should be consulted for an understanding of any domestic structure built in the city prior to 1821:

Manucy, Albert. The Houses of St. Augustine, 1565-1821.
St. Augustine, Florida: The St. Augustine Historical
Society, 1962.

Edited by John C. Poppeliers, Architectural
Historian
National Park Service
March 1965

PART III. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement

1. Architectural character: The Papy house is typical of the now relatively rare, modest, coquina domestic structures built in St. Augustine in the early 19th century. The interior was extensively altered--probably in the 1930's.
2. Condition of fabric: well maintained.

B. Description of Exterior

1. Number of stories and bays; over-all dimensions; layout-shape: Two stories, three-bay front; approximately 23'-3" (front) x 28'-2 1/2"; rectangular with small north side addition 4'-9" x 10'-10 1/2".
2. Wall construction: Coquina with plaster.
3. Porches: There are two cantilevered second-floor balconies centered on the front and rear elevations. Both are of frame construction and have shed roofs; both have 3 1/2" board flooring with approximately a 1/4" space between each board, square wooden corner posts, square wooden balustrades and molded wooden railings. The roof construction of both is covered underneath with 2", 3", and 6" "V"-edge boarding. The dimensions of the rear balcony are 7'-7" x 3'-11"; the front is approximately the same size.
4. Chimneys: A square exterior chimney of coquina masonry with brick molding and tile core is located on the south side. An old Franklin stove set in coquina masonry is attached to the south side of this chimney.
5. Openings:
 - a. Doors and doorways: The four exterior doors which are placed in simple wooden frames, are 20th century replacements (or perhaps alterations) of earlier wooden doors. On the surface they are of 2", 3", and 5" vertical boarding, and each has a small diagonally-placed square opening with purple glazing.
 - b. Windows: 20th century six-over-six-light, double-hung wooden sash throughout. All windows also have recently installed wooden frame screens.
6. Roof:
 - a. Shape, covering: The Papy House has a gable roof with a ridge running north-south (parallel with the front,

street elevation). The pitch of the slope towards the street is steeper than that of the rear slope. The small 20th century two-story, north side bathroom addition also has a gable roof with a ridge running north-south. Both roofs are covered with hexagonal cement-asbestos shingling. The roofs of the second-floor cantilevered balconies are shed-roof continuations of the main gable roof and are covered with the same material.

b. Cornice: Simple wooden box cornices.

C. Description of Interior

1. Floor plans; first floor: A large single-room plan. Second floor: Single-room plan
(Previously these two rooms were probably divided each into two. A large beam, visible now at the ceiling of the first floor, running the width of the house (north-south) and approximately 1' x 8" in height and width, indicates the likely location of a former partition).
2. Stairways: A two-run stairway to the second floor is located in the rear northwest corner of the house; the first run is along the rear (west) wall; a square landing is at the corner; and the longer second run is along the north (side) wall. The open-string stairway has: simple molded wooden railings; simple square wooden newel posts; two square wooden balusters per tread; and modern linoleum floor tiles. A small, square wooden "trap" door in the ceiling of the second floor gives access to the low attic space.
3. Flooring: The first floor of this "basementless" structure has colorful, 20th century tile flooring, obviously in imitation of Spanish work. The baseboard of the first floor is also of tile, as are the window sills (dark blue tiles). The flooring of the second story is of white oak boarding, approximately 3 1/4" in width. The bathrooms also have recently installed tile floors.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: The walls are of solid coquina masonry construction with a stucco finish painted white. The ceiling of the first floor is composed of 2", 3", and 6" "V"-edged yellow pine boarding (part of remodeling supposedly done about 20 years ago). A similar yellow pine ceiling is on the second floor.
5. Doors: The doors are 20th century replacements (or perhaps alterations) of earlier doors. On the surface they are of 2", 3", and 5" vertical boarding, and each has a small diagonally-placed square window with purple glazing. The bathroom has simple unpaneled wooden doors.

6. Decorative features and trim: The first floor has tile baseboards and window sills. The second floor has yellow pine baseboards and tile window sills. 55-5AUG 38-
7. Lighting: Modern electric.
8. Heating: Both the first and second floors have 20th century coquina fireplaces on the south wall; each is made entirely of coquina and has a mantel with brackets, columns, and panel that extend to the ceiling. These clumsy fireplaces are similar to those added to the O'Reilly House at 32 Avilés Street (HABS No. FLA-123), which is also owned by the Sisters of St. Joseph.

D. Site

1. General setting and orientation: The house faces almost directly east; it is situated immediately adjacent to the street.
2. Outbuildings: Although no outbuilding can now be associated with the Papy House, the structure has become a part of the Sisters of St. Joseph convent-school complex, the main buildings of which are to the west and northwest.
3. Landscaping: Along the street line, immediately to the north and south of the structure, are masonry walls (that to the north is coquina and is approximately 7' high; that to the south is of cement block and is approximately 4' high). A paved walk leads from the rear to the convent, etc. A lawn surrounds the rear and sides of the house, and there are also a number of small random-placed trees.

Prepared by John C. Poppeliers
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National Park Service
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